# Librarians in the Academic Ecosystem

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## Abstract

Much of what academic librarians do does not look like what "faculty" do—classic, stereotypical, tenure-track, classroom faculty. Instead, it looks like support work, or administration, or is invisible: all things that are distinctly not valued by classic faculty. Much of the research in library literature, the talk among academic librarians themselves, seems to center on benefits and privileges, and the distinctions are not based on faculty vs. librarian status but on other factors; for example, salaries for librarians, as for economists, English faculty and nursing instructors are mostly set by discipline and market conditions. It will be more productive for librarians to take a political and strategic perspective: with one overarching realization, and one focused goal. The realization is that the "faculty" role is itself diverse: it is not classic nor stereotyped nor even "classroom" in many cases. The variation within the group "faculty" is in many respects more significant than the variation between the groups "faculty" and "librarians." The focused goal is to seek the status that will place librarians in the decisions of which they should be part.

## Introduction

In 1993 I wrote the article "Deconstructing Faculty Status," in which I tested the arguments being put forward for faculty status, which mostly consisted of, if-then statements: if faculty-status, then these-benefits (Applegate 1993). The these-benefits part of the equation had very weak empirical evidence. This is not surprising in terms of research, because the two sides of the supposed sequence—faculty status and benefits—are both multidimensional and their relationship is embedded within a complex

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environment. Identifying, measuring, and disentangling any type of cause and effect is problematic from a research design perspective.

In the following twenty-five years I have lived the life of a librarian, a library director, a library science faculty member and chair, a governance leader (elected president of the faculty, at two institutions), and now an academic administrator in charge of faculty affairs. I end where my suspicions began: that the future of librarians and academic libraries lies in how they are connected to their campus and where their voices participate in decision-making. It is indeed important to understand what status they are given, because that status itself may give, or deprive them of, a particular voice. To focus on the status in isolation from the voice is to miss the point.

During the last sixty years, the university landscape has become a very mixed and complicated ecosystem. Has the debate over "faculty status for librarians" kept up? When phrased as "faculty status for librarians," the wording implies a dichotomy: there are faculty, and there are staff, and librarians want to be on the "faculty" side: faculty will recognize us as their peers, their colleagues, and their allies. That dualism is not empirically supportable. Instead, the situation is far more diverse: there are many different species that coexist in this ecosystem, and, hence, the search for people "like us" and who "accept us" and who are "allies" requires much more nuance.

This essay will describe elements of academic personnel—librarians and varieties of faculty–with two lenses: employment and governance. The employment picture is empirical and pragmatic: what people, with what qualifications, are involved in what tasks, in what numbers? The governance issue is philosophical and practical: who makes what decisions? Who sits at what table with what voice on what issues?

## Background

This is not a research study, but an observational and analytical essay. It is not systematic, but it does reflect a substantial portion of the ecosystems within which many academic librarians exist.

Some quantitative data is presented below to illuminate some of the landscape. Some of the most important data sources in academic employment research are the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Survey (IPEDS), which populates educational statistical databases, and analyses produced by HigherEdJobs, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and *Inside Higher Ed* staff. To supplement this data, selections from policies at three institutions or systems are included: Indiana University (including Bloomington, a very high-research institution, and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, a high-research activity institution; Indiana University, n.d.); Michigan State University (Michigan State University, n.d.); and Texas A&M University[1] (Dean of Faculties 2017).

The personal perspective comes from the author's experiences in researching, living, and leading higher education and academic library administration. These roles include research on staffing of academic libraries, unionization in academic libraries, and the "jurisdiction" (subject-matter expertise) of librarianship (Applegate 2007, 2008, 2010, 2009); professional experience as an academic tenure-system librarian (eighteen years), an assistant and associate professor of library and information science (fourteen years), a library director (eight years), and an academic department chair (four years); service in faculty governance on committees from budget to curriculum as well as years as faculty president at both a small (2000 student) and large (30,000 student) university; finally, as a full-time administrator, assistant vice chancellor for faculty affairs. I have made policy, administered policy, and lived under policy. I have been asked, as a librarian, why I did not have student evaluation scores in my tenure dossier, and, as a faculty member, why I didn't report to the dean of the library. I have recruited librarians and faculty members, retained, evaluated, and helped tenure them; I have lost them, though not many.

The overwhelming lesson from these life experiences is that the neat categories of IPEDS, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), and other surveys are a poor fit to the real variety of life. Instead of housing a small number of inbred species as one might see on a commercial farm, instead, academia is populated with a wild variety of animals, even when you are only talking about "faculty." What do academic librarians, and leaders in the rest of academia, need to understand about the place of librarians in this complex ecosystem?

## Academic Employment—Numbers and Names

What is the work of academia? The classic tasks of higher education are teaching, research, and service, supported by those in clerical, professional, and administrative roles. Each of the three core tasks, seemingly simple, is shockingly diverse. They have varying contexts, varying disciplinary assumptions, varying assessment mechanisms and standards, and even varying meanings. The job and academic news site HigherEdJobs, the American Association of University Professors, and the National Center for Education Statistics all have different definitions and categorization schemes.

Within the US economy, a report by HigherEdJobs, based on US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics data, states that higher education jobs represented 2.72 percent of all US jobs in 2017 (HigherEdJobs 2018). This percentage has been slightly decreasing over the period 2011 to 2017 as overall employment (number of jobs) has increased while higher education employment has stayed relatively stable (2). In any given period, over the last five years (2013–17), faculty positions ranged from 25 to 30 percent of all jobs posted on HigherEdJobs. Therefore, "faculty,"

even as broadly defined as in HigherEdJobs, are a minority of higher education employees (4).

On the HigherEdJobs website (https://www.higheredjobs.com/), the major categories are "administrative," "faculty," and "executive." Among "Administrative Positions" is the category "Libraries": 512 postings as of 10-10-2018, roughly the same as "Career Counseling and Placement" (502), "Extension and Outreach" (490), and "Counseling" (449), all of which are areas that in some institutions are staffed with people called "faculty" and at others by people called "staff" (HigherEdJobs, n.d., "Administrative"). In the "Faculty" category, there is no "Library" subset; "Library and Information Science" (133) is listed as a subset of the "Science" category, along with "Computer Science" (HigherEdJobs, n.d., "Faculty"). However, as of mid-October 2018, many if not most of the entries in this category are actually librarian positions, not library science: that is, library practitioners, not people who work as faculty in graduate, degree-granting programs of library and information science. The confusion is understandable. Library science program faculty exist only in a very small number of institutions (approximately fifty ALA-accredited programs at American universities). In the rest of academia, at some institutions, librarians are called librarians, at others, professors of library science, even when they do not offer courses or degrees.

One of the most basic ideas about "faculty" is that they are the people who teach. But who actually teaches?: as of 2018, not so much the classic full-time tenure-track faculty member. In a report released in October 2018, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reckoned those who deliver instruction as 73% non-tenure-track (AAUP 2018). In research institutions, there are many graduate students teaching; in community colleges, many per-term instructors (AAUP 2018). The student in a classroom or online sees "the instructor"; administrators staffing those sections see many possibilities, and the least numerous possibility is a full-time tenure-track faculty member

The AAUP and others use the term "contingent" faculty, although that also combines many different employment arrangements, some of which are almost as full-time and steady work as tenure itself. AAUP phrases this grouping as "contingent faculty can be known as adjuncts, postdocs, TAs, non-tenure-track faculty, clinical faculty, part-timers, lecturers, instructors, or non-senate faculty" (AAUP 2018, 1). That is a very broad list. The same report notes that a large percentage of non-tenure-track faculty have multiyear appointments, which is far more secure than per-course instructors. It is conceivably, possibly, arguably, even more secure than tenure, because a tenure-track system has an "out" along with the "up": it is not possible to simply continue performing at a basic level and keep one's job year after year indefinitely. Probationary tenure-track faculty, that is, are potentially less secure than continuing, annually renewed, non-tenure-track faculty.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2016; IPEDS, Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System) has separated "faculty" from "instruction." As the AAUP has "contingent faculty" and "tenure-track faculty" even though both teach, the NCES separates "instructional" faculty as a functional category, those who teach, from faculty as a status, those who are identified as faculty.

> NCES / IPEDS Glossary:
> **Instructional Staff**. An occupational category that is comprised of staff who are either: 1) Primarily Instruction or 2) Instruction combined with research and/or public service. The intent of the Instructional Staff category is to include all individuals whose primary occupation includes instruction at the institution. [Prior to 2012, the terms "full time instructional faculty" and "adjunct instructional staff" were used.]
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> **Faculty.** Persons identified by the institution as such and typically those whose initial assignments are made for the purpose of conducting instruction, research or public service as a principal activity (or activities). They may hold academic rank titles of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer or the equivalent of any of those academic ranks. Faculty may also include the chancellor/president, provost, vice provosts, deans, directors or the equivalent, as well as associate deans, assistant deans and executive officers of academic departments (chairpersons, heads or the equivalent) if their principal activity is instruction combined with research and/or public service. The designation as "faculty" is separate from the activities to which they may be currently assigned. For example, a newly appointed president of an institution may also be appointed as a faculty member. Graduate, instruction, and research assistants are not included in this category.
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> **Faculty Status.** A status designated by the institution according to the institution's policies. "Faculty" may include staff with academic appointments (instruction, research, public service) and other staff members who are appointed as faculty members. The designation "faculty" is separate from the activities to which the staff members are currently assigned. For example, a president, provost, or librarian may also be appointed as a faculty member. For IPEDS reporting, graduate assistants do not have faculty status. (NCES 2019)

Note the key aspects here: "faculty" is what an institution defines it as ("identified by the institution as such"), and it may or may not include teaching ("whose *initial* appointment" [emphasis added]); "instruction, research *or* public service" (emphasis added), "separate from the activities to which they are *currently* assigned" (emphasis added); "or librarian may also be appointed as a faculty member." It seems that from 2012, the term "faculty" no longer adequately mapped to the classic teaching function, and that the term "instructional staff" was developed to capture this activity.

Over the years, accelerating in the twenty-first century as reflected in

these definitional changes, the traditional faculty triad of research AND teaching AND service becomes steadily less a part of the landscape: fewer people have all three responsibilities, and reward systems vary in how each of the three are recognized and supported. Anecdotally, fewer faculty take all three parts equally seriously.

From NCES data, starting in 1970, university and colleges saw an increase in faculty headcount, but the percentage of faculty who were full time dropped significantly. Employment status changed from 71.6% full time to 52% full time (NCES 2015, calculated from table 315.10). During the same period, the prevalence of tenure declined. From 1991 to 2016, the percent of institutions with a tenure system at all dropped from 62% to 51%, including a 1% drop among for-profit institutions; from 90% to 79% (11%) among nonprofit/nonpublic doctoral institutions; and from 76% to 60% (16%) among nonprofit/nonpublic master's institutions. Tenure systems in community colleges decreased slightly from 62% to 58%. In public institutions virtually all doctoral or master's institutions continued to maintain tenure systems.

With a decline in the prevalence of tenure systems, and an increase in employment of part-time faculty, full-time tenure-track faculty have become rarer. One blunt effect of this is that when tenure-track faculty members see a librarian wanting to sit at the "real faculty" table, what they may see is that a finite and shrinking number of seats is being invaded by nonfaculty. Few faculty perceive this pie as growing; of this shrinking pie, who would want to give parts of it away?

## Functions

NCES and AAUP count people who are called faculty and who may include instruction in their duties. Teaching is one "faculty" function, although not the only one, and it may not even be any part of the job of many people who are called faculty. There is great variety: what roles each person called faculty is called to do, what functions mean what within those roles. There are many overlaps that exist between roles, functions, titles, and actual people. And there are many overlaps between what "faculty" do and what librarians do.

### *Teaching*

What does teaching mean?—faculty member, classroom; delivering one recorded lecture, among many, in an online program; instructional design; creation of learning objects; supervising interns; organizing clinical sites; course coordination; mentoring students in research; serving on master's, doctoral, or senior thesis committees? Is advising part of that? If course-selection advising is done by staff, do students ask for letters of reference from those staff—or from their faculty advisors?

Relate this variety of activities to two iconic functions of academic

librarians: cultivating informational skills in students and providing recorded information to researchers. The idea behind cultivating informational skills is that a college-educated person in the United States should be able to find and assess information relevant to his or her needs, for academic or personal uses. The idea behind providing recorded information to researchers is that research is a dialog between past and future: all inquiry and creation of new knowledge builds upon previous inquiry and is a message to, a communication with, future research colleagues.

Cultivating informational skills can include delivering lectures; designing webpages; creating learning objects; mentoring students through the process of gathering, assessing, and incorporating information; coordinating instruction across a variety of modalities and academic lifespans; assessing learning—but not (usually) providing grades, certificates, or degrees.

Should academic librarianship be defined as, or equated to, the teaching function of faculty? In deciding who belongs to this group or another group, one looks for common aspects. Which makes more sense: to group the Psychology 101 lecturer and the information-literacy librarian together, or the information-literacy librarian and the research data–curation librarian?

*Research*

What does research mean? In the history of higher education, research was for a long time a sort of side effect. The people who delivered professional training to future clerics, bureaucrats, lawyers, and physicians, including the preliminary "liberal arts," were clumped together physically and in their spare time, it seems, managed to whip together the *Summa Theologica* and like by-products. The grande ecoles of France produced bridge-builders, officers, and teachers. Then, in the nineteenth century, the idea of systematic research was transported from the gentleman-scientist to the university (Evans 2016). From this time, roughly speaking, there was a distinction made in the United States between "colleges" (of instruction) and "universities" (for research).

Currently, research is not only something that happens in universities, it is a significant way of distinguishing and ranking institutions of higher education. Research-based teaching (awarding of doctoral degrees), funding associated with research (R&D spending), and research publications and citations are some of the primary metrics used to separate out a special group of universities—nationally, by Carnegie classification, by membership criteria for the American Association of Universities (directly) and the Association of Research Libraries (indirectly); and internationally, the Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai) and Times Higher Education (Center for Postsecondary Research 2018, American Association of Universities 2016, Association of Research Libraries 2018, ShanghaiRanking [*sic*] Consultancy 2018, Times Higher Education 2018).

Research can take many forms and involves many different actors at a variety of levels. "Research" itself can encompass bench or lab experimentation as well as "creative activity" to recognize those activities that artists do. So, the statistician on a frog mortality study; the poet in the English department; the furniture maker in the School of Design; the producer of a critical edition and translation of a sixth-century manuscript; the astronomer charting quasar pulses and theorizing about their origin; the recipient of a PCORI (Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute) grant proposing a new algorithm for capturing morbidity data: all of these are people recognized as engaging in research.

When the conceptualization of what research is centers upon the creation of new knowledge, then academic librarians often find themselves without a named and acknowledged role. Classically, librarians provide recorded, existing, not-new, data and knowledge to researchers. They might, in the course of their activities, research how best to provide recorded knowledge, but the emphasis is upon performance—librarians are evaluated on how they provide the knowledge, not on how they advance the science of providing knowledge.

Yet, going forward, even if librarians continue their focus on the "recorded" part of information, they can have a role within the "new" part of knowledge. For example, meta-analyses of medical research results such as the Cochrane reviews make full use of the finding-recorded-information function as part of the new-knowledge-creation research process. Or, thinking in terms of team science where dozens of coinvestigators in one project have differing and complementary roles, the "informationist" role can be as valuable as a data collector or statistical analyst.

Research data curators perform an essential, indeed a federally mandated, role in scientific discovery. However, most of the time, this is seen as in service to the "real" researchers, current (the producers of the data sets) and future (those who will use them). Whose colleagues are these librarians: to whom are they closer—the librarian who negotiates contracts with Elsevier, the archivist adding metadata to digitized letters, or the digital humanist making discoveries about the use of particular words through history?

*Service*

The service function is even more varied and misinterpreted than teaching or research, as far as both understanding and respect go. For some people, "service" means the almost-invisible collaborative activities that keep universities running: committee work, drafting and revising policies and procedures, participating in shared governance. This is often labeled "departmental" or "university" service. Service also includes the almost-invisible collaborative activities that keep disciplines running: reviewing

articles, editing journals, organizing conferences, creating guidelines, orienting new members to professional organizations.

In some fields, particularly but not only in the health professions, "service" also has a very concrete meaning of the provision of professional "services" to external clients. In an apprenticeship model of learning, trainees follow an experienced professional around; they observe, they apply didactic information to live cases, over time they become "doers" not just learners. "Clinicians" and "clinical professors" work in "clinics" to which external clients come for services.

In either of these two concepts of service, librarians can find many overlaps. "Almost-invisible" is a good term for the work that librarians accomplish in providing information easily, accessibly, and without cost to the end-user within the university community (usually without direct cost). Librarians also provide individualized information services to clients within the university. These activities are often regarded by librarians as professional services. They are services offered by members of a distinct profession, with distinct "jurisdiction" or subject-matter expertise, in this case, information-services expertise.

There are some inherent weaknesses in the consideration of librarian activity as service, however. The first weakness is in the concept of professional services. Librarianship as a profession is not as clearly defined nor as well-accepted as more traditional lawyer, doctor, and teacher roles (Applegate 2010). Is librarianship an advanced, expertise-based profession, or, is it a support function, like program management, grant proposal development, or human resources?

The second weakness is that almost-invisible collaborative activities benefitting a university or academia as a whole are . . . almost invisible. They are often regarded as, at best, routine activities, and, at worst, unwanted intrusions into the real work of faculty: research and (sometimes) teaching. The more important that this organizational labor is, the more it is likely to resemble administration or management—and faculty are not usually rewarded for administration, not in prestige or titles or tenure.

Administration often calls forth even more pointed reactions than "service." Administration is the proverbial "dark side," the "other," the antithesis to the fabled symposium of professors working in an egalitarian way (Bedeian 2002). In Canada and in Europe, the collegial aspect of academia is expressed in the use of the word "faculty" to denote an organizational unit; for example, instead of calling the unit the School of Discipline, they say, "Faculty of Discipline." Administration is in this sense an intrusion upon the ideal. It is an import from business, it is a reflection of mechanistic bureaucratic mentality. Think about personal essays about becoming administrators (e.g., Perlmutter 2002–2019). Think about how the rising cost of higher education is blamed on the growth of administration.

"What is measured, matters" is a catchphrase from business, and in academia, what is rewarded, matters. In the primary reward system for academic appointees, the promotion and tenure system, administration is not often rewarded. It is not recognized, it is not measured, it is not reported, it is not considered. The key to promotion in rank is excellence—in research, in teaching, and (sometimes) in service.

*Titles*

Now, what are the titles used by people who do these things? Academia does not look much like a controlled farm, with a few well-defined and selected species, making up monocultural groups. The equivalent of mass-produced corn and cows, industrial farm species, are the normative denizens of academia: tenure-track faculty, the non-tenure-track teaching faculty, and per-course instructors. Librarians don't look very much like those animals. They teach, but only individually; they research how to, and how best to, provide information; they don't serve as instructors of record, they do not advise, write letters of recommendation, or chair thesis committees.

But academics aren't like a controlled farm—they resemble more a wild ecosystem. There are many species, interacting with each other in complex ways.

Table 1, "Titles for faculty types," shows this visually. It displays how responsibilities for teaching, research, and service are accounted for among different faculty classifications at three different research-oriented university systems. While research universities represent only a minority of American institutions in terms of numbers (only 100–200 among 3000–4000), they tend to be large and thus educate and employ almost half of all students and faculty (Applegate 2007). For each faculty type, and for each job domain (teaching, research etc.), asterisks are included (*** ** and *) to indicate the relative importance of that domain for faculty evaluation and advancement (most to least); the absence of a mark indicates that that type of faculty is not evaluated on, or rewarded for, that type of work.

This table has some visual lessons. One lesson is that there is not any visible theme, any overriding coherence. There is, instead, a great variety, between titles and between institutions. Therefore, when librarians are NOT like this or that classification of faculty, they are not alone. Librarians may not teach for-credit courses. Neither do "research professors." Librarians may not conduct independent research. Neither do lecturers. Librarians almost always do service—but is that organizational labor (committee work) or is it the provision of professional services to clients? Are those clients external, the way visitors to law, dental, and medical clinics are? This table is only the most broad-based look at these functions; also, when it comes to individuals, cases will differ even more.

Table 1. Titles for faculty types

| Univ. | Title | Tenure-Eligible | Teaching | Research | Service | Other | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Academic specialists | N | | | | ** | Variety of duties |
| C | Academic specialists | N | * | * | * | * | "Assigned duties . . . related professional development activities" |
| C | Archivist | N | | * | * | * | |
| A | Clinical faculty | N | * | | *** | | Must choose either teaching or service; most common is service |
| B | Clinical professor | N | ** | * | *** | | |
| B | Fixed-term Academic Professional Track | N | *** | * | *** | | Can be excellent in either teaching, research or service |
| C | Fixed-term Academic Staff | N | | | | * | Unclear; referred to in some sections, but without a separate manual |
| C | Fixed-term Faculty | N | | | | | |
| C | Health professions faculty | Y | | | | | Unclear. |
| B | Instructional professor | N | *** | * | * | | |
| A | Lecturers | N | *** | | * | | |
| B | Lecturers | N | *** | | | | |
| A | Librarians | Y | | * | * | *** | Performance |
| B | Librarians | N | | | | *** | |
| C | Librarians | Y | | * | | *** | "For academic governance purposes, Librarians are included in the term 'faculty'" |
| B | Professor of the Practice | N | *** | | | | Full-time outside of the university |
| A | Professors (asst./ assoc./ full) | Y | * | *** | * | | Must choose only one area of focus; most common is research |
| A | Research associates | N | | *** | | | |
| C | Research associates | N | | *** | | | |
| A | Research faculty | N | | *** | | | |
| C | Tenure-system faculty | Y | ** | ** | ** | | |

*Sources:* Indiana University, n.d.; Michigan State University, n.d.; and Dean of Faculties, Texas A&M University 2017

*Benefits*

Research and writing on faculty status has often considered these functional definition points (e.g., on teaching, Julien and Genuis 2011; on research, Kennedy and Brancolini 2018). There is also another angle that gets even more attention: whether librarians *receive the benefits* of faculty status (e.g., Walters 2016; Vix and Buckman 2012). The functional definition can be seen as "do librarians deserve" faculty attributes because of what they do, and the benefits aspect can be seen as "do librarians receive" faculty perquisites, because they are part of the "faculty" group?

This writer is disenchanted with spending valuable research time and effort on painstaking, pointillist, examinations of benefits. Much attention has been paid to this, and it seems disproportionate to the practical results. Consider money and working conditions. Base salaries are set primarily by disciplinary history and by market conditions. Some disciplines have historically been more prestigious, demanding, and attractive; some disciplines have a glut of qualified people. Nursing instructors currently make more than English professors. That means that librarian salaries are comparatively little affected by whether librarians are considered the same as "all faculty," because "all faculty" do not receive the same salaries.

Even the availability of leaves is potentially determined by more powerful factors than faculty status alone (though see Connell 2013): Are librarian leaves similar to academic-year employees (9 or 10 month faculty), to laboratory scientists, or to academic administrators (12 month employees or faculty)? Consider in particular two key elements perceived to be part of faculty benefits: tenure and research support.

*Tenure.* This is one of the hardest hurdles to cross. There are many academic librarians who have some aspects of faculty status but not formal tenure. The librarians of two universities recently managed to achieve a degree of faculty status understanding that politically they could not achieve even that if they insisted it include tenure; at another, administration sought to remove librarians from faculty status but settled for only removing tenure.

Yet how important is tenure? There are two primary reasons cited for tenure. One is protection of academic freedom. However, for the sake of the spirit of inquiry, *all* people engaged in academia ought to have some level of protection, not just tenure-track faculty. If the single-course adjunct, the non-tenure-track teaching professor, or the graduate student don't have academic freedom to choose how they express themselves to convey their courses, over half of classrooms that students sit in lack freedom, because over half of all classrooms do not have a tenured faculty member leading them. All librarians should be champions of academic freedom for all academic actors, by their professional values (ALA 2014). Academic freedom cannot depend upon faculty status.

The second major benefit of tenure is economic security. Is this a crucial point? In two of the three universities in the table, the majority of nontenured academic positions have at least one year's notice of termination. At the other, the notice period is five months. Compared to tenured faculty, this is less secure; compared to almost any nonacademic employer, this is very secure. Moreover, someone who is not on the tenure-track often does not face the choice of "up or out." At one university, less than 1% of full-time non-tenure-track faculty are involuntarily terminated each year, while approximately 1–5% of tenure-track faculty cases end in termination. Tenure does not measurably improve longevity. Involuntary termination numbers pale in comparison to the percentages of professors who leave their positions for any number of reasons: 30–50% of new hires are not retained (personal communication, 2018).

Considered from one person's own point of view, the possession of tenure is a comfort and a goal. Taken as a data point, academic librarians as a group have more job security than most people in the United States; even within academia their security is much greater than adjunct faculty, student workers, or research staff paid through "soft" money. Librarians on the tenure-track may even have less job security than academic librarians who are not, because they must meet stringent criteria to get tenure, and cannot simply mark time year after year.

*Research time and funding.* Do librarians have the same opportunities for research funding, sabbaticals, and research-related travel, as nonlibrarians? What is sometimes missing in this formulation is that many tenure-track faculty do not "receive" research time or funding as a matter of right or status. Instead, they garner the resources themselves, through competitive internal or external funding sources. Even those faculty who are given "start-up packages" of course releases and funding for equipment, summer salary, travel and lab assistance then face an implicit and sometimes explicit understanding that start-up funding is generated from the research activities of other faculty, and they will be expected, in turn, to bring in external dollars to continue the cycle. "Publish or perish" is a well-known saying, but "get grants or leave" is as important a truism in many research institutions.

Instead of benefits for librarians individually, I propose that the key aspect of the status of librarians in academia is not what they receive but where they contribute. What role do they play in decision-making about policies and resources? Who is part of what interest groups, and, what influence do or should those interest groups have on decision-making? Put another way, who is at the table, and whose voice is heard?

## Who Is At What Table?

The director (dean) of a library at a leading research institution recounted that when she began there, the provost (chief academic officer) met with the deans of the academic schools, and included the dean of the library. A new provost started a few years later. Under the new provost, the "deans" group included only those who headed teaching-research units (schools of business, liberal arts, etc.). The dean of the library was moved to the support-services group: information technology, center for teaching, research infrastructure. All of a sudden, it was a different set of decisions, a different set of information to which the library dean was privy, and a different type of input expected from her.

If librarians do not have faculty status, will they be at the right table?

University faculty—of all types—struggle with roles in governance, and it becomes more complex as multiple faculty types are created, as staffing numbers shift between classifications, and as labor is divided between full-time and part-time people. Librarians typically work full-time. When they look around at the people who work in their "department"-equivalent, many of them are full-time librarians (with or without faculty status), many are full-time staff, and most of the rest are student workers of various types. In contrast, in a typical university "service" department such as English or Mathematics, or in an entry-level institution like a community college, the instructional work force, the staff for the multiple sections of classes, consists of many, and often a majority, of per-course instructors. Who are more "like" the tenure-track faculty in that institution: librarians, who are full-time and fully committed to an institution but who do not teach, or, adjuncts, who teach but are not full-time and are neither required nor, often, encouraged, to be committed to the institution?

Given this shaky division of "faculty" in terms of roles and commitments, a better question is, Who are the people involved in academic decision-making, and for what decisions?

The language of the AAUP and of accrediting agencies says that philosophically and practically, "faculty" control the curriculum. The philosophical basis for this is that the faculty are the only ones with the perspective and responsibilities to develop and maintain the curriculum, because of their disciplinary expertise and their engagement with teaching and research.

> AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities:
>
> The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process (AAUP 1990)

The practical basis is that institutional accreditors, such as the Higher Learning Commission, insist on this, and accreditation allows institutions to access federal funding, through student aid or in grants.

> Higher Learning Commission, Criteria for Accreditation:
>
> The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.
>
> [Glossary:]
> ***Faculty*** is used to refer to the group rather than to each individual instructional staff member, typically to distinguish faculty from administration. (HLC 2019, criterion 3.C.2)

The ACRL *Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians* considers librarians to be inherently entwined in those faculty activities and responsibilities, grouping them specifically with faculty, and apart from administration:

> Where the role of college and university librarians, as described in the preceding paragraphs, requires them to function essentially as part of the faculty, this functional identity should be recognized by granting of faculty status. Neither administrative responsibilities nor professional degrees, titles, or skills, per se, qualify members of the academic community for faculty status. The function of the librarian as participant in the processes of teaching, research, and service is the essential criterion of faculty status. (ACRL 2018)

No one traditional faculty member has disciplinary expertise in all disciplines represented by any university; it is their collectivity that has expertise and thus responsibilities. It is the assertion of the ACRL that academic librarians have an essential role in teaching, research, and service and therefore are appropriately classified as faculty. Most of the rest of the ACRL statement, however, is about defining functions and stipulating benefits, rather than what librarians ought to DO with that status. A status where functions overlap both with administrators and with faculty, and which provides only marginal benefits, is not a solution. Or, perhaps, it is the answer to the wrong question. Instead of a question about who is like this or that employee, or a question about what tangible benefits accrue from this or that status, better questions are, What power comes along with what status? What power, position, perspective, and influence on decision-making is a part of "faculty status"?

## Not Perks but Decisions: Implications for Practice

Academic librarians should consider four main aspects when approaching the issue of faculty status, affecting how or whether to seek it, and what to do with it: what benefits them; the plausibility of their arguments for a particular status; the responsibilities that accompany a particular status; and, the goal: in what decisions a particular status entitles them to be involved.

*What Benefits Them*

Considering the benefits aspect of faculty status is not solely about improving one's own personal life. It is the strategic sense that, if you want good librarians, you need to attract good people. What qualities of work life attract those people who can do the sorts of jobs, with the level of quality, that you want for your profession in general, and for your organization in particular? Perceptions differ—a 2017 study found that librarians in non-tenure institutions felt that "faculty status does not attract better qualified applicants," but those in tenure situations did think so (Silva, Galbraith, and Groesbeck 2017, 433).

To take tenure as an example, job stability for many academic librarians is not greatly different from the general job security that many full-time academics enjoy, regardless of classification. To the person planning a move in a few years, faculty-style tenure is irrelevant. So, tenure may be unimportant to this or that individual. But, if the lack of tenure leads to a decrease in qualified candidates for positions, that itself is a strategic threat.

*The Plausibility of Their Arguments for This or That Status*

Plausibility is especially important because of the rapid evolution of the academic ecosystem. Are the functions, the qualifications, and the daily and yearly activities of academic librarians similar enough, or reasonably comparable enough, to those of "faculty" (of whatever type) that other "faculty" will understand the connections? If they are not the same, are the other "faculty" willing to accept them as equivalent?

For example, at one university the standards for librarians to be promoted and gain tenure are phrased in very different ways than for other faculty, but there are key similarities in the requirement for "peer review" and for "impact." Peer review and impact are seen as universal attributes of scholarly life (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis 2018).

*The Responsibilities that Come with This or That Status*

A strongly-felt theme in library literature is that "faculty status" has the potential to detract from a librarian's *real* work. It involves extras that some see as irrelevant to day-to-day effectiveness; those tasks that are the usual responsibilities of "faculty"—such as research and publishing—are not thought of as an enhancement of a librarian's knowledge, skills, and performance, but as essentially unnecessary distractions from core functions and value to the campus (Carver 2005; Hill 2005; Cronin 2001). Yet, how much can librarians say that faculty work is not their work and still claim that faculty status is their appropriate status?

One way past the "publishing is a distraction" argument is to take a broader look at what faculty do. Full-time faculty do far more than just show up in classrooms and journals. Faculty mentor students, attend

evening events, advise student organizations, market their programs, participate in the campus "day of service." If librarians are not doing that, will they be willing to sit on a unit's curriculum committee; serve on student discipline panels; work on the campus strategic plan? The more of these contextual faculty functions and duties that librarians say "no" to, the less plausible their classification as faculty becomes.

*In What Decisions a Particular Status Entitles Them To Be Involved*

Finally: long-term success, as both individuals and as a profession on campus depends on an effective role in decision-making. What campus decisions do librarians need to participate in for the sake of a functioning, responsive, and proactive library? What decisions of the university can benefit from the input of librarians, not just for the sake of the library, but for the sake of a functioning, responsive, and proactive university? How can including librarian perspectives benefit the institution?

Librarian roles often have a strong managerial aspect—far more than for most faculty. This can be a "flaw" when trying to fit into the "research-teaching-and-maybe-some-service" model of many tenure-track, research-focused faculty. It also can be a "feature," and a valuable one. The standard for "excellence" for which faculty, particularly tenure-track faculty, are rewarded often attracts, rewards, and results in a focused and necessarily narrow expertise. One does not claim to be a global expert in biology, nor in insects, not even in blow-flies, but in blow-fly migration patterns. The narrower the slice, the more attainable is world renown in that area. Administrators, by the nature of their work, must have a broader and a better view of the academic organization as a whole than any individual researcher-teacher.

Like administrators, librarians simply are not, and cannot be, narrow. Consider the common subject-liaison model. There are few institutions that have only one discipline per librarian. More often, librarians serve multiple departments, and multiple areas within those departments. Thus, they necessarily have multiple responsibilities and perspectives, every day in their jobs. When they move into campus service, they can find that their perspectives are thus broader than those of faculty who teach and research only within their own single departments or research centers. That makes them skilled partners in organizational communication.

At an institutional level, decision-making around income, expenses, and priorities is a matter of considering overall benefits. Any argument for resources for X program, *by the participants* in and beneficiaries of that program, is easily dismissed by others as self-centered. All unit-only arguments are self-centered, and thus, valued equally, which is to say, not at all. The only arguments with a lasting force in budget and strategic decisions are those that show an appreciation for the mutual benefits that programs can give to each other, not just to themselves. Librarians can be

valued participants in this conversation when they bring their inherently interdisciplinary perspective to bear. This is so much more powerful than any simple budget statement that "the library needs more money because journals are more expensive." Librarians who operate on a level of the common good are thoughtful contributors to the larger community.

If academic librarians are not active in some real and meaningful way on campus, the academic library is unconnected to its community. An unconnected library is an isolated library, an invisible library, and, inevitably, a "we have Google why do we need you" dead library. And librarians will be gone with the typewriter.

*Not Perks but Decisions: Implications for Research*

Research on academic libraries has visited and revisited and re-revisited "faculty status" for academic librarians for a very long and repetitive time. Guidelines have been developed—but even then, the guidelines acknowledge the reality of variation in real life: some librarians have a named status that is considered "faculty," and some do not (ACRL 2011a, 2011b). Some of this research has been relatively easy to design: one states a premise that X feature is or is not present (descriptive research), or that X feature is correlated with Y feature (quasi-experimental); operationalizes the variables into measurable entities; applies calculations and statistical testing; and presents the findings. But easy research is not necessarily the most useful research.

Academic librarian status research needs to improve its scope. It cannot focus solely on librarians. It needs to take advantage of, and contribute to, managerial science and higher education research. Researchers need to understand, adapt, and test theories of effective organization on the situation of libraries and librarians on campus. They need to understand and incorporate insights from historical and sociological research on the development and evolution of higher education. Put another way, instead of a framework that resembles an antique menagerie with each species in an individual cage, examined as an isolated specimen (there is the library, there are the librarians within the library), effective research will understand librarianship as a species within a rich ecosystem, where each species has effects on every other one.

Contextual, ecological, theoretically grounded research will give academic librarians a deeper perspective on what kinds of professional status, responsibilities, and activities are associated with having an effective voice in academia, and why. Knowing *what* is a first step—it teaches us about today. Knowing *why* is the necessary second step because it allows us to evolve into the future. Academia itself is changing, so every actor in academia must understand what the opportunities for their roles are in the future.

Librarians must build upon effective research and insights from practice to develop and have a distinct, knowledgeable, and effective voice

within the academic ecosystem, or they will become irrelevant, and sooner rather than later, erased.

## Conclusion

Five months after securing my first job, a tenure-track position as a reference librarian, the small college administration decided that candidates for tenure must possess a doctoral degree. Librarians were fully "faculty," yet, without a PhD, could not achieve tenure; instead they were eligible for long-term renewable contracts. I am currently five months into what I think of as my last job, as assistant vice chancellor for faculty affairs at a campus with 2,000 faculty—of all types—and 30,000 students. I have researched questions of faculty status, unionization, and academic library staffing. As president of a faculty council, I have shepherded through a major constitutional revision regarding the voting rights of non-tenure-track faculty. I have been a new librarian, a library director, and library science faculty member and chair. I have achieved tenure and promotion—twice!—and assisted junior faculty in the process as their chair or director. As a site visitor for a regional accreditor and the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation, I have seen how decisions are made, by whom, on campuses of all sizes.

In the end, to be successful and sustainable, the role of academic librarians within the evolving academic universe needs to include the following: sufficient benefits to attract and retain skilled and dedicated professionals; sufficient decision-making authority to protect and promote information resources and services; and sufficient collegial interactions with students, faculty, and staff to be part of how academia evolves into the future. "Just us" research has to change to "our world" research; "our benefits matter" has to change to "our voice matters."

## Note

1. Throughout the text, examples and anecdotes are real but not fully identified. Some information is taken from sites that are only for internal members of particular universities.

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